

The following will help prepare you for your Year 11 English exam and provide valuable practice for the actual G.C.S.E. exam.

Paper 1 contains three questions. Showing understanding of non-fiction is question two.

In both your mock and in the actual G.C.S.E. you will be able to study the texts in advance of the exam – but having a go at an 'unseen' text, and then going through it, will help you focus closely, making use of your own skills. You will learn to read for meaning, select appropriate material and analyse the author's craft.

This is a difficult text but you don't need to understand every word to complete the task successfully!

Task :

Read the extract from 'Over the Bridge' in which Richard Church tells the true story of how his life was changed when his parents took him for an eye test.

- **Describe the thoughts and feelings that Richard Church experiences**
- **Comment on the ways in which Richard Church uses language to interest his readers**

Top Tips :

- Ignore the first part of the task – just focus on the bullet points.
- You are asked two questions here – treat them separately
- The first question is simply asking for summary. It's a 'What?' question! Read through each paragraph and jot down every emotion and feeling that Richard Church experiences.
- Link each emotion to an example or evidence – i.e. explain why or when Church has these feelings
- Simply join these points together in one piece of continuous writing.
- Use your own words as far as possible (this proves that you actually understand the text!) – e.g. 'At first, when he found out that he might go blind before he was fifteen, Church was pleased that he was different' rather than 'He was proud of this distinction'.
- Summarise! Keep it short and to the point. You should write less than a side of A4, perhaps considerably less if you are concise.
- You could start '*Richard Church felt...when he first discovered that...*'
- The second question is different – it's a 'How?' question! This is more demanding. A good answer here will gain you higher grades.
- Look closely at the way that the article is written. Comment on the literary techniques – and their effect . Look in particular for examples of the following:
 - How Church makes the story personal
 - The use of detail and the vivid descriptions
 - The detailed analysis of his own feelings
 - The use of exclamation marks
 - Varied sentence length / dramatic short sentences
 - The reactions of his parents and brother

Extension Activity :

This childhood memory is clearly set some time ago. Write about what we learn about life at that time and about Richard Church's family life

Section B - Non-fiction Texts
from *Over The Bridge - An Essay in Autobiography*
by Richard Church

A medical examination at school had revealed the fact that I was short-sighted. The doctor took me solemnly between his knees, looked into my face, and said. 'If you don't get some glasses, you'll be blind by the time you are fifteen, and I shall tell your parents so.'

I was rather proud of this distinction. Fifteen! That was so far ahead that it meant nothing to me, except a sort of twilight at the end of life. My parents thought otherwise, and one Saturday afternoon I was taken, via a steep road called Pig Hill, to a chemist's shop on Lavender Hill, Clapham, opposite the first theatre that I was ever to enter, 'The Shakespeare'. Behind the shop was a room where my eyes were tested in the rough and ready way customary in those days. The chemist hung an open framework that felt like the Forth Bridge around my ears and on my nose. Lenses were slotted into this, and twisted about, while I was instructed to read the card of letters beginning with a large 'E'

I remember still the astonishment with which I saw the smaller letters change from a dark blur into separate items of the alphabet. I thought about it all the following week, and found that by screwing up my eyes when I was out of doors I could get to some faint approximation of that clarity, for a few seconds at a time.

This made me surmise that the universe which hitherto I had seen as a vague mass of colour and blurred shapes might in actuality be much more concise and defined. I was therefore half prepared for the surprise which shook me a week later when, on the Saturday evening, we went again to the shop on Lavender Hill, and the chemist produced the bespoke pair of steel-rimmed spectacles through which I was invited to read the card. I read it, from top to bottom! I turned, looked in triumph at Mother, but what I saw was Mother intensified. I saw the pupils of her eyes, the tiny feathers in her boa necklet; I saw the hairs in Father's moustache, and on the back of his hand. Jack's cap, might have been made of metal, so hard and clear did it shine on his close-cropped head, above his bony face and huge nose. I saw *his* eyes too, round, inquiring, fierce with a hunger of observation. He was studying me with a gimlet sharpness such as I had never before been able to perceive.

Then we walked out of the shop, and I stepped on to the pavement, which came up and hit me, so that I had to grasp the nearest support - Father's coat. 'Take care, now, take care!' he said indulgently (though he disapproved of all these concessions to physical weakness). 'And mind you don't break them!'

I walked still with some uncertainty, carefully placing my feet and feeling their impact on the pavement whose surface I could see sparkling like quartz in the lamplight.

The lamplight! I looked in wonder at the diminishing crystals of gas-flame strung down the hill. Clapham was hung with necklaces of light, and the horses pulling the glittering omnibuses struck the granite road with hooves of iron and ebony. I could see the skeletons inside the flesh and blood of the Saturday-night shoppers. The garments they wore were made of separate threads. In this new world, sound as well as sight was changed. It took on hardness and definition, forcing itself upon my hearing, so that I was besieged simultaneously through the eye and through the ear.

How willingly I surrendered! I went out to meet the blazing and trumpeting invasion. I trembled with the excitement, and had to cling to Mother's arm to prevent myself being carried away in the flood as the pavements rushed at me, and people loomed up with their teeth like tusks, their lips luscious, their eyes bolting out of their heads, bearing down on me as they threw out spears of conversation that whizzed loudly past my ears and bewildered my wits.

'Is it any different?' asked Jack, in his proprietary voice. He was never satisfied until he had collected all possible information on everything which life

brought to his notice.

'It makes things clearer,' I replied, knowing that I had no hope of telling him what was happening to me. I was only half-aware of it myself, for this urgent demand upon my attention made by the multitudinous world around me was the beginning of a joyous imposition to which I am still responding today, breathless and enraptured, though the twilight of the senses begins to settle.

My excitement must have communicated itself to the rest of the family, for Father proposed that, instead of our going home to supper, we should have the meal at The Creighton, an Italian restaurant near Clapham Junction. This was the first time in my life that I ate in public, and I remember it so clearly because the table-cloth appeared to be made of white ropes in warp and woof and the cutlery had an additional hardness, beyond that of ordinary steel and plate. When the food came to the table, the steam rising from it was as coarse as linen. I saw the spots of grease on the waiter's apron, and the dirt under his fingernails.

All this emphasis made me shy, as I would have been, indeed, without this optical exaggeration that had the effect of thrusting me forward, to be seen as conspicuously as I now saw everything and everybody around me. But I ate my fried plaice, dissecting it with a new skill, since every bone was needle-clear. Our parents drank stout, their usual supper glass. Jack and I had ginger-beer, a rare luxury that added to the formality of the feast.

By the time we reached the darker streets near home, my head ached under the burden of too much seeing. Perhaps the grease of the fried fish, and the lateness of the hour, had something to do with the exhaustion that almost destroyed me as we trailed homeward. The new spectacles clung to my face, eating into the bridge of my nose and behind the ear-lobes. I longed to tear them off and throw them away into the darkness. I tried to linger behind, so that at least I might secrete them in the pocket of my blouse.

But before I could further this purpose, something caught my attention. I realised that, after all, the side-streets were not quite dark; that the yellow pools round each gas-lamp, flow as clearly defined as golden sovereigns, were augmented, pervaded, suffused by a bluish silver glory. I looked upward, and saw the sky. And in that sky I saw an almost full moon, floating in space, a solid ball of roughened metal, with an irregular jagged edge. I could put up my hand and take it, ponder its weight, feel its cold surface.

I stopped walking, and stared. I turned up my face, throwing back my head to look vertically into the zenith. I saw the stars, and I saw them for the first time, a few only, for most were obscured by the light of the moon; but those I saw were clean pin-points of light, diamond-hard, standing not upon a velvet surface, but floating in space, some near, some far, in an awe-striking perspective that came as a revelation to my newly-educated eyes. I felt myself swept up into that traffic of the night sky. I floated away, and might have disappeared into space had not a cry recalled me.

It was Mother's voice, in alarm, for she had looked round, perhaps impatiently, to urge me along, only to see me lying on my back on the pavement, in a state of semi-coma. Father picked me up, and I was still too far gone to resent being carried like a baby. I knew, however, that Jack would have something to say when we got to bed, for he would accuse me of showing off, or creating a scene. He had a horror of any form of demonstration, and he discouraged extravagance and self-indulgence, two weaknesses which he was always prepared to detect in me, and to correct.